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ABSTRACT

Influences in the classroom of English as a second language (ESL) are briefly reviewed as a preface to a discussion of the past, present, and future of ESL instruction in Canada. Ten influences on ESL's past are examined in terms of their effects on ESL teachers: international, national, social, political, economic, commercial, media, institutional, pedagogical, and professional forces. Knowledge about the present state of ESL is then categorized into (1) content and (2) trends and fads, and outlined as areas of interest to ESL teachers. In a discussion of the future of the profession, 12 questions are posed for teachers to use in forming their own predictions. They address such issues as world events that may affect the profession, the world's need and use for English instruction, federal and provincial government policies, the ESL teacher's role and business, implications of national statistics for English instruction, trend-setting regions and cities in Canada and what they are doing and saying, topics of discussion in professional journals, implications of new knowledge and technology, the results of changes in the last five years of ESL, current institutional changes and their effect on ESL, shifts in the power base affecting the future of the profession, and the acceleration or deceleration of change. (MSE)

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Predicting the Future of ESL

Mary Ashworth

Time present and time past
Are both perhaps present in time future,
And time future contained in time past.

T. S. Eliot, *Burnt Norton*

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Hindsight by itself is not good. It's smug. It allows one to make excuses or to lay blame and to emerge from a disaster personally unscathed: "If only someone had done such and such at such and such a time." Foresight, on the other hand, requires an act of courage. For whereas in hindsight the future appears to have picked up the actors on the stage and to have shaken them until they were limp, foresight entails the actors' taking hold of the future and attempting to mold it to a chosen pattern. Predicting the future with a reasonable degree of accuracy so as to play some part in shaping it demands two kinds of knowledge — a knowledge of time past and a knowledge of time present, for both are contained in time future. Creating the future demands the will to analyze this knowledge, to design alternative scenarios, and then to act.

This paper will begin with a brief examination of the ESL classroom and will then explore Time Past, Time Present and Time Future in ESL, attempting to show their inter-connectedness. It will conclude by offering a few suggestions as to how ESL teachers might take some control of the future—their future.

THE CLASSROOM

The three interacting components of a classroom are the students, the teacher, and the curriculum. Each of these can be subdivided into smaller components and it is over these smaller components that teachers can exercise greater or lesser degrees of control. For example, no two students are alike. They vary according to age, first language spoken, previous education, goals, motivation, physical and emotional health, intellectual capacity, socio-economic status, learning style, attitude, ethnic affiliation, outside support, and personal needs. Teachers have very limited control over most of these factors. On the other hand, teachers have considerable control over many of the components which together make up a teacher: pre- and inservice training, membership in a teachers' organization, attendance at conferences, journals read, role assumed in the classroom, personal characteristics, goals, motivation, attitude towards the job, the employer and the profession, and the ability to organize for learning. The degree of control a teacher has over the curriculum and the program varies from institution to institution and from province to province. Some items which lie in this domain are as follows: approach, method and techniques used; overall design of the curriculum; degree of emphasis placed on listening, speaking, reading and writing; cultural content; availability of audio-visual materials; textbooks; length and intensity of the course; its philosophy and goals; class size; ability levels within the class; support services, and the general climate surrounding the program.

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Many of the items mentioned above, and others not listed, are influenced by groups and policies outside the classroom that together can be considered as forces. Some of these forces are beneficial to students; others are harmful. They are bound up with both the geography and history of a country and must be understood and either harnessed or combatted according to the nature of their effect on education. But because each classroom is to some degree its own world, each teacher has to assess which forces external to it are influencing what goes on and whether that influence is good or bad. We will now look briefly at some of those forces and at the effect they have had in the past on ESL teachers.

TIME PAST

Coleridge said, "If men could learn from history, what lessons it might teach us." The experiences of this century have much to teach us about the causes of mass migrations of people (poverty, war, unstable economic systems, unacceptable political regimes), about how to work with government, about the mercurial changes in public attitudes towards immigrants and education, about the administration of large institutions, about the efficacy of pressure groups, about the need for constant vigilance in order that the rights of those who cannot speak for themselves, amongst whom are children, are safeguarded.

In this section we will look at the effects certain forces have had in the past on ESL teachers, particularly on public school teachers, about whom too little is written. Ten forces will be considered — international, national, social, political, economic, commercial, media, institutional, pedagogical, and professional.

1. International

Language teaching, wherever it occurs, is never free from international influences. These can be roughly classified into three groups:

(a) The effects which follow an upheaval in a distant country resulting from war or economic depression or the overthrow of a political regime, and which have repercussions elsewhere in the world. Canada has received refugees from war-torn Europe, from Third world countries, and from nations which have attempted to move away from Russian-style communism.

(b) The effects which follow decisions taken in one country for the good of its own citizens or for the good of people outside its own boundaries. For years Canada maintained a highly-selective immigration policy in the belief that a "white Canada" was best for Canadians, but more recent policies to admit refugees and dependents and to open the doors to Asians and members of the Third World have changed the faces of ESL students from being predominantly Caucasian to reflecting all the races of the world.

(c) The effects of the deliberations of international gatherings. The fact that English is the working language of many of these meetings has, in itself, given a boost to the teaching and learning of English as a second or foreign language overseas. The United Nation's work on behalf of refugees moved the conscience of nations like Canada to accept some displaced people. Annual meetings of professional organizations like TESOL ensure that recently-acquired knowledge about

ESL/EFL and associated disciplines is aired for examination and comment.

International forces affected ESL teachers in the following ways:
(a) the source countries of non-English speaking immigrants changed from being primarily European to encompassing Asian and African countries, requiring teachers to understand and appreciate new and different cultures and languages;
(b) refugees arrived with no funds and, in some cases, limited or interrupted education, needing upgrading and skill training as well as English;
(c) there has been a phenomenal increase in theoretical knowledge about language acquisition and considerable changes in methods and techniques in ESL/EFL resulting from research and experimentation in many parts of the world, causing teachers to question principles and practices which for years had seemed so right;
(d) the demand for ESL/EFL teachers overseas opened up opportunities for travel and employment for people who previously would have had little chance of living and working in a foreign country.

2. National

Book IV of the report of the Royal Commission on bilingualism and biculturalism entitled *The Cultural Contribution of the Other Ethnic Groups* (1970) prompted a response from Prime Minister Trudeau that Canada is a muticultural society in a bilingual framework. While the debate continues today on precisely what that statement means, the effect has been an increased interest in second language learning including both French and English and the heritage languages of the indigenous and immigrant minority groups. A further effect was to force into the open the question of assimilation versus integration; that is, the degree to which minority groups should be able to live according to their customs and values, and the problem of what to do about overt and covert racism in the society.
These issues which arose in the national context affected ESL teachers in the following ways:
(a) the goals of ESL programs moved from being assimilationist to being more open to the notion of integration;
(b) more and more teachers, both regular teachers and ESL teachers, received instruction on some aspect of multiculturalism and/or ESL in their pre-service and inservice training;
(c) the growing interest in the teaching and learning of second languages stimulated research in Canada which added to the body of knowledge in both theory and practice.

3. Social

Canada has had a somewhat stormy history in its acceptance and settlement of non-English speaking people, a history which includes the education of immigrant children. The legacy of the pre-war years was not one to be proud of, but the years since 1945 have seen a steady improvement in what schools have done for immigrant children. While undoubtedly the horrors of the holocaust and the savage destruction that went on in Europe and Asia sensitized Canadians to the plight of thousands of refugees and fostered the need to extend a helping hand, there was also a growing awarenss that many children born in Canada were in some way

deprived. Deprivation might be physical, emotional or intellectual. When the deprivation theory was applied to immigrant children, they were seen (wrongly, of course) as being linguistically and culturally deprived and therefore in need of remediation. Advocacy groups spoke out on their behalf resulting in improvements in both the number of ongoing ESL classes and the quality of instruction.

The willingness of Canadian society to accept immigrants and to pay the costs of their children's education had a direct effect on ESL teachers:
(a) increased funding created a market for ESL teachers which in turn stimulated teacher-training institutions to mount training programs;
(b) the status of ESL teachers grew both within the profession and within the larger community.

4. Political

As every teacher knows, decisions made by politicians at both the federal and provincial levels affect, for good or ill, what goes on in classrooms across Canada. Two policies are worth a brief look.

First, over the past decade the federal government has poured money into the teaching of French to anglophone children while refusing to provide equivalent funds to teach English to immigrant chilldren on the grounds that education is a provincial responsibility. The teaching of French in English-medium schools was seen as a political necessity if the country was to hang together; the teaching of English to immigrant children, by contrast, had a low priority. It was some years before some provinces accepted their responsibility for the provision of special educational services to ESL children. Ontario, for instance, moved considerably faster and more generously than British Columbia, but now all provinces have policies regarding ESL.

Second, in 1967 the federal government adopted a new immigration policy which brought about a dramatic change in the source countries supplying the majority of the immigrants. The United Kingdom, the U.S.A. and Europe lost ground as immigration from India, Pakistan, Hong Kong, Singapore and other Asian countries rose.

ESL teachers across Canada felt the effects of these policies:
(a) for some years there was a grave shortage of funds and, therefore, little demand for trained ESL teachers;
(b) many ESL teachers spent hours of their out-of-school time writing briefs and lobbying politicians;
(c) ESL teachers organized their own associations which provided them with a forum for discussion and a vehicle for action;
(d) there was an increased demand by teachers and counsellors for information on the linguistic and cultural similarities and differences between children from Asia and Canada-born children, and often ESL teachers were expected to supply this information;
(e) today, in most provinces, ESL receives some recognition as a specialty area in teaching.

5. Economics

The post-war economic boom had two effects on ESL:
(a) some well-educated, articulate immigrants settled in Canada and joined the various groups across the country advocating better educational services for non-English speaking children; and
(b) the healthy economy could afford to supply these services without cutting back on services to other children. But now that the economy is no longer booming, the number of ESL classes in public schools is being reduced. While one reason for this is the decline in immigration, the other is simply the necessity to cut budgets. A second effect is that trained ESL teachers on temporary contracts are being replaced by teachers untrained in ESL who are on permanent contracts. Unless these teachers are required to take ESL training, the quality of ESL instruction will fall, to the detriment of the children.

A faltering economy and high unemployment also affect the attitude of some members of society towards immigrants. People in trouble often try to pin the blame for their misfortune on someone else and immigrants too frequently become the scapegoats.

ESL teachers have been affected by economic forces in the following ways:
(a) because the number of immigrants entering Canada rises or falls in tune with the economic situation, school boards are reluctant to put ESL teachers on permanent contracts but keep them instead on temporary contracts resulting in layoffs and uncertainty;
(b) society's attitude towards immigrants affects willingness to pay school taxes which support programs for immigrant children.

6. Commercial

Most ESL textbooks are produced under our free enterprise system, the exception being guide books or resource books commissioned and published by ministries or departments of education or by large school boards. Because publishers must make a profit to stay in business and because, in days gone by, the Canadian market was seen to be very small, the only Canadian text of note during the 1960s and early 1970s was *An Introduction to Canadian English* by Carson Martin published by the Ontario government. Now that ESL has "arrived", Canadian material or Canadianized material is far more readily available. It must also be remembered that commercial materials reflect either a particular approach to teaching ESL and/or a particular curriculum design, or, of course, they may attempt to be all things to all people. ESL teachers can now feast themselves on a wide array of materials on display at the many conferences now held, a far cry from the famine days of twenty years ago:
(a) ESL teachers can now choose materials which assist newcomers in learning more about Canada and its multicultural society;
(b) on the one hand, the materials teachers choose can influence the methods and techniques they use in their classes; on the other hand, teachers' knowledge of their discipline can dictate the methodology which, in turn, influences their choice of materials.

7. Media

In the early 1970s the media seemed to concentrate on reporting what it saw as racist acts. The situation in British Columbia's Lower Mainland became extremely serious. Finally, due to the efforts of a number of people both inside and outside government, steps were taken to cool things down. The media cut back on the inflammatory nature of some of its reporting and began to tell the public about positive actions being taken to combat racism and to assist in the integration of immigrants:

(a) ESL teachers, at last, received some good press for their work;

(b) some investigative journalists reported the problems faced by schools with a high non-English speaking population, thus helping to put pressure on elected officials to provide better educational opportunities for these children.

8. Institutional

The three institutions with which public school teachers are most concerned are teacher-training institutions, ministries or departments of education, and schools.

There was an initial reluctance on the part of teacher-training institutions to mount training courses in ESL for public school teachers. Perhaps it grew out of the indifference of society in general towards immigrant children or a lack of knowledge about second language learning on the part of the faculty. In Ontario, it was the provincial government that set up the first ESL teacher-training classes. In British Columbia and some other provinces, teacher-training institutions were finally forced to respond to teachers who demanded training along the lines of the Ontario certificate program. Today most teacher-training institutions offer some training ranging from one course to graduate work.

Ministries or departments of education, through their support or lack of support for ESL, have affected the availability of programs, as well as their content and quality, as schools found it difficult to design and mount programs unless additional funds were forthcoming.

The philosophy and policy adopted by a school have a very direct effect on the ESL program. It matters very much whether the ESL program has equal status with other programs or whether the ESL class is always relegated to the basement or the attic. It matters very much whether the school insists on hiring a qualified ESL teacher or whether it sees the post as one that can be filled by someone who is too sick, too old or too incompetent to teach a regular class, provided the individual speaks English, of course!

There is no question that the philosophies and policies emanating from institutions affect ESL teachers in a number of important ways:

(a) the climate created by the administration affects the way in which others view the value of the program, be it a program to train ESL teachers or a program for ESL students, and hence the sense of worth engendered in the instructor and the students;

(b) good ESL teacher-training programs cannot flourish when schools misemploy unqualified teachers in ESL classroom, and without good teacher-

training, both pre-service and inservice, the status, pay and employment of ESL teachers will decline;
(c) the curriculum, or lack of curriculum, is the outcome of policies handed down by the various institutions which affect what ESL teachers MUST do or MAY do in their classrooms;
(d) institutional decisions regarding the design and length of the program affect what a teacher can accomplish in the classroom.

9. Pedagogical

Pedagogical forces which impinge on teachers are many and diverse. There is knowledge that pertains to languages and language acquisition; knowledge that pertains to culture and to social values; knowledge that pertains to methods of teaching and testing children; and knowledge that pertains to needs analyses and curriculum building and to evaluating materials and performance.

Broader than this lie such philosophical questions such as: What are schools for? What is the purpose of education? What is the role of the teacher? And particularly, what is the role of the ESL teacher?

Of all the forces that affect teachers, none has greater influence on what actually goes on inside the classroom than pedagogy, informed, as it is, by related disciplines:
(a) through pre- and inservice training, ESL teachers adopt particular approaches, methods and techniques;
(b) through a combination of theory and practice ESL teachers establish their goals, design their curriculum and plan their lessons in ways which seem appropriate to the needs of their students;
(c) ESL teachers who master the art of evaluating their own performances, their curriculum and the materials they use are able to improve the quality of their instruction;
(d) an understanding of cross-cultural similarities and differences helps teachers to help children, both English-speaking and non-English speaking, to live and work in harmony;
(e) teachers who have developed their own philosophy regarding the goals of education have a stable framework within which to develop their program, and are unlikely to be diverted from sound teaching strategies by every new movement which blows in on the next wind and out on the wind that follows.

10. Professional

Teachers have duties beyond those of teaching. First, they must be concerned for the quality of instruction offered by the profession; that is, they must see that good quality pre-service and inservice training is available to practitioners. Second, they must do more than simply absorb the body of knowledge made available to them by university professors; they must add to it. Third, they must act as advocates for their clients who cannot speak for themselves.

Today almost every province and territory has some form of organization of ESL teachers which allows those teachers to exchange news and views and to speak

to their respective regional governments with one strong voice. The formation of TESL Canada a few years ago gave ESL teachers a national voice which has been used effectively on behalf of adult ESL learners. It is to be hoped that sometime in the near future TESL Canada will speak out on behalf of children. These professional organizations have been of great value to ESL teachers, individually and collectively, and deserve all the support they can get:

(a) professional organizations of ESL teachers have raised the status of ESL teachers, improved their pay and working conditions, and conducted inservice training programs;

(b) they have added to the body of knowledge by encouraging the presentation of papers at conferences and by establishing journals;

(c) they have presented many briefs to government and have been instrumental in initiating and improving services to immigrant children and their families, thus affecting the employment of ESL teachers and those who work in support services such as multicultural home-school workers.

The reader will think of other forces in our society that directly and indirectly affect ESL teachers. What is important in this short paper is not that every force that affects ESL teachers be brought into the open, but rather that all ESL teachers become aware of those forces which affect them in their particular situation and that they question whether the effects are beneficial or harmful to the students in their care.

TIME PRESENT

In his recent book *Megatrends*, John Naisbitt says, "The most reliable way to anticipate the future is by understanding the present" (1983, p. 2).

Knowledge about the present state of ESL can, for the sake of ease, be divided into two kinds: (1) content and (2) trends and fads.

1. Content

Content knowledge is knowledge that comes neatly packaged in reports and often has a statistical base. If this information is studied carefully, it may give an indication of what the future holds. These reports deal with individuals and organizations, with the movement of people, with the health of economic and political systems, and with the state of education in a single institution or across the country. The following are some topics which are of interest to ESL teachers and on which information is available:

(a) immigration statistics giving numbers entering Canada, their ages and source countries;

(b) demographic studies show changes in immigrant catchment areas;

(c) reports on the state of the Canadian economy;

(d) unemployment statistics;

(e) reports (including Hansard) which outline or comment on government policies;

(f) reports dealing with the state of economic and political systems in other countries;

(g) annual reports issued by ministries and departments of education;
(h) inhouse reports on individual institutions or school districts.

2. Trends and Fads

Naisbitt (quoted earlier) maintains that "Trends are bottom-up, fads are top-down" (1983; 3). That is, trends begin in local communities and spread ever more widely until they embrace a large region, while fads are imposed upon communities from the top. If we think of two recent innovations in ESL, English for Special Purposes and the Silent Way, the former grew from the ground up as more and more teachers saw the need to give their students not more English, but English that would help them in their particular situations. This trend has spread and endured and has been adapted to a variety of language programs. The latter innovation, the Silent Way, was imposed from above by one man, Caleb Gattegno in his book *Teaching Foreign Language in Schools: The Silent Way* (1972). This "fad", as Naisbitt might term it, quickly acquired a religious fervour, but it has steadily lost both appeal and adherents, a common phenomenon with fads.

The following are a few areas where ESL teachers will have to watch for developing trends and fads and to judge their short and longterm effects:
(a) the rise and fall of overt racism;
(b) the rise and fall of pressure groups;
(c) society's attitude towards education;
(d) the political philosophies of recently-elected individuals and governments;
(e) recent research and theories in ESL;
(f) evolving classroom practices;
(g) new government or institutional policies and practices.

Keeping up-to-date with what is happening NOW can be very time-consuming if one person tries to be omniscient, but a small group of five or six people, each of whom undertakes to study a particular area, can be the core of an excellent "Think-Tank".

TIME FUTURE

No-one can predict the future with total accuracy, but given a good data base it is possible to make some intelligent guesses regarding possible alternatives. As in all research, the process starts with some thought-provoking questions, the answers to which must be considered for both their short term and long term effect. The questions that will be posed will not be the same for all ESL teacners because of the different conditions under which they teach — public school or adult education; community college or church basement; urban setting or rural; area of high immigration or low; for a responsive or unresponsive administration and/or government.

The following questions are intended to get readers started on writing their own questions which will form the basis for their predictions as to what the future may hold:

1. What events have taken place in the world which may, in time, affect you as an ESL teacher?

2. Is the world going to continue to need English? If so, what kind of English and for what purposes?
3. What policies have the federal and/or provincial governments set out that may, in time, affect you?
4. What is the main business you are in? Teaching English? Communications? Information dispersal? Counselling? Upgrading? Remedial teaching? Vocational training? Providing a support service? Preparing citizens? (If you don't know what business you are in, you may have trouble predicting the future.)
5. What do figures from Statistics Canada indicate regarding the economy, unemployment, immigration, bilingualism, the birthrate, growth of cities, and educational opportunities?
6. Which cities or regions of Canada are trend-setters in ESL? What are they currently doing or saying?
7. What topics are under discussion in ESL journals? What do they say that may affect your situation?
8. How will new technology, such as computers, or new knowledge, such as brain research, affect ESL—and how soon?
9. What changes have occurred in the last five years in ESL? With what results?
10. What changes are currently taking place in your institution and what will their effect be on ESL?
11. Who has the power to affect the future of ESL? Is that power base likely to shift elsewhere?
12. How can change be accelerated or decelerated? What does the past teach?

Once the information has been gathered, the first task of the Think-Tank is to come up with three scenarios for the future: the best, the worst, and the most likely. If the worst is also the most likely, immediate action is obviously necessary.[1] But action by the group must be on the basis of a shared sense of direction; that is, there must be a common vision of what a good future would hold for ESL teachers and their students. Creating that vision is the second task of the Think-Tank. Marilyn Ferguson, in her brilliant book, *The Aquarian Conspiracy,* writes: "Tomorrow is likely to bring scary, even cataclysmic, surprises" (1980; p. 302). May we be ready!

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[1] For ways of making change see N. M. Ashworth, "Twenty Axioms for Making Changes in Educational Policies and Practices," *TESL Talk,* 22, 4, 1-4, Fall, 1981.